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Emerging opportunities to target gene transcription and DNA repair in drug discovery

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CHAPTER 8

Summary,
Future Perspectives and
Nederlandse Samenvatting

SUMMARY

In this thesis, we aim to elucidate the regulatory mechanisms of DNA transcription and DNA repair involved in regulated cell death and their role in disease pathogenesis, meanwhile developing novel small molecular entities to treat cell-death-related diseases based on the mechanisms identified in this thesis.

Since 1964, scientists found that histone binding to DNA inhibits gene transcription and that chemical acetylation of histones reduces this inhibiting effect¹, more and more evidence emerged that the dysregulation of histone acetylation is tightly linked to oncogenesis and other diseases². In **Chapter 2**, we comprehensively overview the histone acetyltransferase (HAT) modulators as drug candidates in various diseases. The experimental approaches summarized in **Chapter 2** indicate that HATs are druggable in many diseases. HAT modulators, such as inhibitors and proteolysis targeting chimeras (PROTACs), could be promising drug candidates to treat these diseases in the future. Meanwhile, we also point out several major challenges in developing HAT modulators. The difficulty of unambiguous assignment of a catalytic mechanism to HATs impedes the development of well-characterized chemical probes for HATs. Moreover, it is challenging to develop selective inhibitors because of the structural similarity of catalytic pockets of HATs (Figure 1).

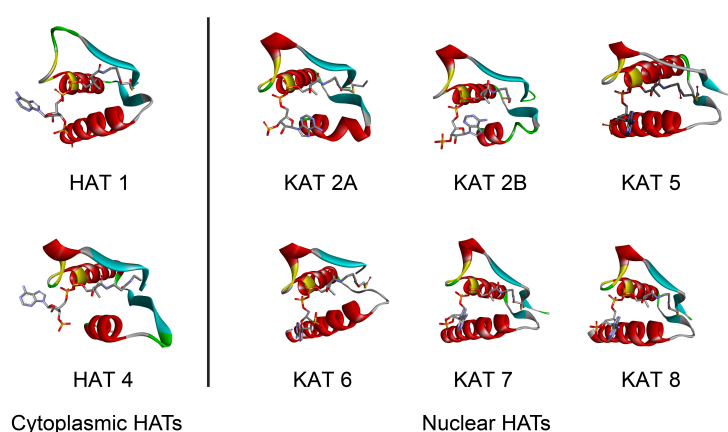


Figure 1|The structures of catalytic domain of HATs binding to Acetyl-CoA. PDB ID: HAT1 (1BOB), HAT4 (5HH0), KAT2A (5H86), KAT2B (1CM0), KAT5 (2OU2), KAT6 (2RC4), KAT7 (5GK9), KAT8 (6BA4).

A well-characterized P30/CBP selective inhibitor, A485, was reported in 2017³. We demonstrate the apoptosis-enhancing effect of A485 in **Chapter 3**. Non-small-cell

lung carcinoma (NSCLC) was identified in 85% of lung cancer patients⁴. Although Epidermal growth factor receptor tyrosine kinase inhibitors (EGFR-TKIs) achieved great success in increasing the overall survival of NSCLC patients, almost all patients will acquire drug resistance after half to one year of EGFR-TKI administration⁴. In **Chapter 3**, we demonstrate that A485 enhances TRAIL-induced apoptosis by upregulating the expression of caspases such as CASP3, 7, and 9. Therefore, a combination of A485 and TRAIL could be an alternative treatment strategy for TKI-resistant NSCLC.

Proteins containing a bromodomain can bind to acetylated histones, which may be responsible for controlling gene transcription and chromatin remodeling⁵. In **Chapter 4**, the most exciting finding is identifying 15-Lipoxygenase-1 (15-LOX-1) has a bromodomain-like region binding to acetylated histone H3. These clues arise from a study with a lipoxygenase family activity-based probe, **Labelox B**. **Labelox B** is a potent covalent LOX inhibitor generated for one-step activity-based labeling of endogenous LOXs. Activity-based probe **Labelox B** was used to establish an ELISA-based assay for affinity capture and antibody-based detection of specific LOX isoenzymes. Moreover, **Labelox B** enabled efficient activity-based labeling of endogenous LOXs in living cells. Interestingly, we observed LOX localization and activity in the nucleus, which was rationalized by identifying a functional bromodomain consensus motif in 15-LOX-1. This indicates that 15-LOX-1 is not only involved in oxidative lipid metabolism but also in chromatin binding, which suggests a potential role in chromatin modifications.

Macrophage migration inhibitory factor (MIF) has been experimentally proven to be a multi-functional protein in many diseases⁶. Clarifying the function of MIF in cells pave the way for MIF-oriented drug discovery and therapeutic design. Thus, we develop 4-iodopyrimidine-based probes to detect MIF family enzymes in **Chapter 5**. The fluorescent probe **8** labels MIF and D-dopachrome tautomerase (DDT) in cell lysate and living cells efficiently, which enables tracking of the translocation of endogenous MIF family proteins upon stimulation. Additionally, in **Chapter 7**, we show that probe **8** enables monitoring of the uptake of extracellular MIF into cells.

Recently, MIF was identified as an executor nuclease in parthanatos⁷, a form of regulated cell death, which may cause neuronal cell death in degenerative disease,

such as Parkinson's disease⁸. In **Chapter 6**, we develop allosteric MIF inhibitors that proved to enable prevention of this process. The inhibitor, MKA031, is able to block the interaction between MIF and apoptosis-inducing factor (AIF), subsequently inhibiting MIF nuclear translocating. Thus, cells are rescued from N-methyl-N'-nitro-N-nitrosoguanidine (MNNG)-induced parthanatos. This class of allosteric inhibitors might be drug candidates in the treatment of parthanatos-related diseases.

In **Chapter 7**, we explore the link between MIF and another form of regulated cell death, ferroptosis⁹. Ferroptosis has a distinct regulatory mechanism, which can potentially be exploited to treat therapy-resistant cancers¹⁰. Ferroptosis is mainly driven by ferrous-mediated Fenton chemistry and lipid peroxidation, which is counteracted by cytosolic oxidoreductases. Although excessive lipid peroxidation is a key hallmark of ferroptosis, it is expected that the ferrous-mediated Fenton chemistry also induces DNA damage. Therefore, we hypothesize that DNA repair mechanisms also play a role in protecting against ferroptosis in addition to cytosolic oxidoreductases. In **Chapter 7**, we demonstrate that homologous recombination (HR) inhibition or genetic depletion of HR proteins, such as breast cancer type 1 susceptibility protein (BRCA1) and DNA repair protein RAD51 homolog 1 (RAD51), sensitizes different cancer cell lines by a factor of 10-100 to ferroptosis. Meanwhile, chemical or genetic downregulation of the cellular levels of the pleiotropic cytokine MIF enhance sensitivity to ferroptosis by a factor 10-100. Importantly, MIF is proven to reside in the same pathway as BRCA1 and RAD51 in HR, and interfering with HR mechanistically connects to induction of P53 translocating to mitochondria and subsequent stimulating radical oxygen species (ROS) production. Our results demonstrate the existence of a MIF-BRCA1-RAD51 axis involved in HR, which counteracts ferroptosis, which provides insight into its utilization in cancer diagnosis and therapy.

In conclusion, we uncovered several molecular mechanisms that modulate DNA transcription and damage repair underlying regulated cell death. Meanwhile, we developed targeted compounds to modulate cell death in disease models.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

In the first part (Chapter 2-4) of this thesis, we explore the druggability of HATs in diseases and the identification of a novel acetyl-histone-association protein. The overview in **Chapter 2** indicates that HATs are promising targets in various diseases, although more potent and selective inhibitors are needed for patient treatment in the future. We describe a combination of A485 and wild-type TRAIL to treat EGFR-TKI lung cancers in **Chapter 3**. In future studies, death receptor (DR)-specific TRAIL variants, such as 4C7 and DHER, could be tested with A485 to determine whether more intensive apoptosis could be induced in cancer cells. In **Chapter 4**, we identify that 15-LOX-1 contains a bromodomain-like region, which explains its nuclear localization. We propose to investigate the cellular function of 15-LOX-1 as an acetyl-histone reader based on several hypothesis. We the following hypothesis 1) 15-LOX-1 could remodel the chromatin to facilitate gene transcription; 2) 15-LOX-1 might harbors enzyme activity to demethylate histone lysine or arginine residues or enzyme activity to demethylate DNA by an iron-mediated catalytic mechanism; 3) 15-LOX-1 might be DNA binding protein (Figure 2a) because of the leucine-zipper formed by two LOXs (Figure 2b). We furthermore hypothesize that other LOX isoenzymes may have yet uncharacterized nuclear functions as well. For example, 5-LOX was shown to be dominantly located in the nuclei (Chapter 4, Figure 4), while its role in the nucleus remains unclear. In this perspective, we consider the exploration of questions related to the role of lipoxygenase family enzymes in chromatin remodeling or the regulation of gene transcription highly interesting. Essentially, this might open up a completely novel direction of research in lipoxygenase biology.

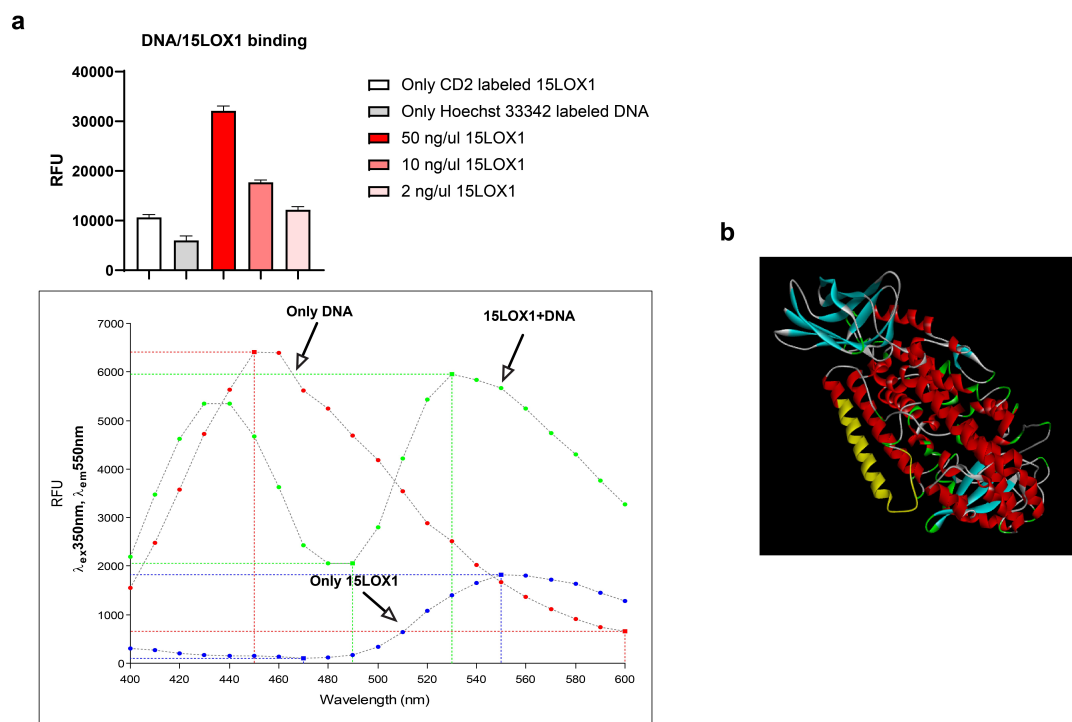


Figure 2|15-LOX-1 could be a DNA-binding protein. a, recombinant 15-LOX-1 forms FRET with DNA, indicating a proximity association between 15-LOX-1 and DNA. **b**, Structural analysis of rabbit 15-LOX-1 (PDB:1LOX) shows a reparative leucine-rich region (yellow colored) in 15-LOX-1, which could be homodimerized and binds to genome DNA.

In the second part (Chapter 5-7) of this thesis, we focus on MIF biology. To facilitate MIF-related research, we generated two 4-IPP-derived probes targeting MIF and DDT. We demonstrated the usages of these probes in the **Chapter 5-7** for cellular localization studies and also for FRET studies in MIF-DNA binding. In the future, 4-IPP-derived probes could be coupled with isotope labeling to track MIF *in vivo* and acquire the MIF expression profile in living animals with medical imaging technology such as multi-slice spiral computed tomography (MSCT). The role of MIF in regulated cell death is discussed in **Chapter 6** and **Chapter 7**. Previously, MIF was proven to be a nuclease to fragment DNA upon parthanatos activation⁷. This pathological process mainly links to neuron degenerative diseases, such as Parkinson's disease⁸. We developed a class of allosteric MIF inhibitors to prevent parthanatotic cell death in **Chapter 6**. These inhibitors need further improvement in medicinal chemistry projects and may be tested in advanced models to validate their anti-degenerative effects and safety as drug candidates.

In **Chapter 7**, we reveal the connection between MIF and ferroptosis. Since the

identification of MIF as a nuclease in 2016⁷, two main cellular functions of MIF nuclease have been proved, executor nuclease in parthanatos⁷ and DNA replication prove-reading nuclease in cancer¹¹. We demonstrate the third role of MIF nuclease that facilitates homologous recombination and drives ferroptosis resistance. Following this track, MIF-targeted compounds could be tested in combination with ferroptosis inducers that are different from GPX4 inhibitors which are metabolically unstable for *in vivo* use. Moreover, according to our data, triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) is the most sensitive cancer type to MIF/Ferroptosis combination treatment. Future studies could focus on TNBC treatment. Additionally, MIF might be a heterogeneous nuclear ribonucleoprotein based on structural similarity (suggested by Angelina Osipyan, dept. Chemical and Pharmaceutical Biology) and coimmunoprecipitation-mass spectrum data. This research pipeline might reveal novel MIF functions in RNA metabolism.

In conclusion, the research described above in the fields of gene transcription and DNA repair merit further investigation. These offer exciting opportunities to advance our understanding of fundamental biological processes in physiological and pathological conditions. Meanwhile, systematical validation of findings and investigate drug candidates *in vivo* are indispensable to pave the way for potential applications in disease treatment.

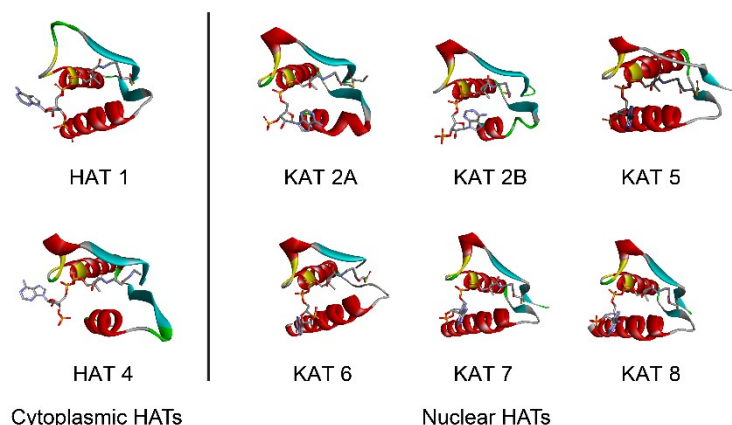
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NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

In dit proefschrift richten we ons op het onderzoeken van mechanismen die een rol spelen bij DNA transcriptie en DNA reparatie, omdat deze mechanismen een belangrijke rol spelen in pathogenese. Binnen dit onderzoek gebruiken we nieuwe kleine moleculaire remmers om deze processen te onderzoeken en zo aanknopingspunten te vinden voor nieuwe behandelmogelijkheden voor ziekten waarin deze mechanismen een rol spelen.

In 1964, hebben wetenschappers ontdekt dat de binding van histon eiwit aan DNA de gen transcriptie remt en dat de chemische acetylering van histonen dit remmende effect vermindert¹. Er werd steeds meer bewijs gevonden dat de ontregeling van histon acetylatie sterkt gecorreleerd is aan oncogenese en ander ziekten². In **Hoofdstuk 2** geven we een uitgebreid overzicht van kleine moleculen die gebruikt kunnen worden voor de modulatie van histon acetyltransferase (HAT) enzymen en die potentieel als medicijn bij verschillende ziekten toegepast kunnen worden. Deze experimentele benaderingen, zoals samengevat in **Hoofdstuk 2**, geven de indicatie dat HATs “druggable” zijn bij veel ziektes. HAT modulatoren zoals remmers en “proteolysis targeting chimeras” (PROTACs) kunnen veelbelovende geneesmiddelen zijn om deze ziekten in de toekomst te behandelen. Daarnaast beschrijven we de verschillende grote uitdagingen bij het ontwikkelen van HAT modulatoren. Het blijkt lastig te zijn om één duidelijk katalytisch mechanisme voor de activiteit van HATs enzymen aan te wijzen waardoor het lastig is om goed gekarakteriseerde chemische probes te ontwikkelen. Bovendien is het een uitdaging om selectieve remmers te ontwikkelen omdat de katalytische domeinen van de verschillende HATs structureel veel op elkaar lijken (Figuur 1).



Figuur 1: Structurele weergaven van de binding van Acetyl-CoA aan de katalytische domeinen van HATs: PDB ID: HAT1 (1BOB), HAT4 (5HH0), KAT2A (5H86), KAT2B (1CM0), KAT5 (2OU2), KAT6 (2RC4), KAT7 (5GK9), KAT8 (6BA4).

In 2017 werd de goed gekarakteriseerde P300/CBP selectieve remmer A485 gepubliceerd³. In **Hoofdstuk 3** beschrijven we toepassing van deze remmer om apoptose te bevorderen. Niet-kleincellige longcarcinoom (Non Small Cell Lung Carcinoma; NSCLC) wordt gediagnosticeerd in 85% van de longkanker patiënten⁴. Ondanks dat “Epidermal growth factor receptor tyrosine kinase inhibitors” EGFR-TKIs een groot succes bereiken in het verhogen van de algemene overleving van NSCLC patiënten, ontwikkelen bijna alle patiënten geneesmiddel resistentie een half jaar na toediening met EGFR-TKIs⁴. In **Hoofdstuk 3** laten we zien dat A485 de door TRAIL geïnduceerde apoptose verhoogt middels de up-regulatie van de expressie van caspases zoals CASP3, 7 en 9. Onze data laten zien dat combinatietherapie met A485 en TNF-related apoptosis-inducing ligand (TRAIL) een alternatieve behandelingsstrategie kunnen zijn voor TKI resistente NSCLC.

Eiwitten die een bromodomein bevatten kunnen binden aan geacetylerde histonen, welke mogelijk verantwoordelijk kunnen zijn voor het de regulatie van gen transcriptie en chromatine remodeling⁵. In **Hoofdstuk 4** is de bijzonderste ontdekking dat 15-Lipoxygenase-1 (15-LOX-1) een bromodomein achtige regio bevat dat bindt aan geacetyleerd Histon H3. De aanwijzingen hiervoor komen van een studie over een lipoxygenase familie “*activity-based probe*” (ABP), **Labelox B**. **Labelox B** is een potente covalente LOX remmer die wordt gegenereerd voor 1-staps “*activity-based labeling*” van endogene LOXs. Activity-based probe **Labelox B** werd gebruikt om een ELISA assay op te zetten voor *affinity capture* en een op antilichaam gebaseerde detectie van specifieke LOX iso-enzymen. Bovendien maakte **Labelox B** efficiënte

“*activity-based labeling*” van endogene LOXs in levende cellen mogelijk. Het is interessant dat we zagen dat we zowel LOX lokalisatie als activiteit in de kern waarnamen. Dit kan verklaard worden door de identificatie van een functioneel bromodomein consensus motief in 15-LOX-1. Dit geeft aan dat 15-LOX-1 niet alleen betrokken is bij de oxidatieve lipide metabolisme maar ook bij chromatine binding. Dit suggereert een potentiële rol bij chromatine modificaties.

Van “Macrophage migration inhibitory factor” (MIF) is experimenteel bewezen dat het een multifunctioneel eiwit is dat betrokken is bij meerdere ziekten⁶. Het ophelderen van de functie van MIF in cellen maakt de weg vrij voor MIF-georiënteerde medicijn ontwikkeling. In **Hoofdstuk 5** beschrijven we de ontwikkeling van 4-iodopyrimidine gebaseerde probes om enzymen behorende bij de MIF familie te detecteren. De fluorescente probe **8** labelt efficiënt zowel MIF als “D-Dopachrome tautomerase” (DDT) in cel lysaat als in levende cellen, waardoor we de translocatie van endogeen tot de MIF familie behorende enzymen na stimulatie kunnen volgen. Daarnaast laten we in **Hoofdstuk 7** zien dat probe **8** het mogelijk maakt om de opname van extracellulair MIF in cellen te monitoren.

Recentelijk is MIF geïdentificeerd als een eiwit met nuclease activiteit wat een rol speelt bij parthanatos⁷, een vorm van gereguleerde celdood welke mogelijk de sterfte van neuronen veroorzaakt in degeneratieve ziekten zoals bijvoorbeeld de ziekte van Parkinson. In **Hoofdstuk 6** ontwikkelden we allosterische MIF remmers die dit proces konden voorkomen. De remmer MKA031 kan de interactie tussen MIF en “Apoptosis Inducing Factor” (AIF) blokkeren, waarna de translocatie van MIF naar de kern geremd wordt. Oftewel, cellen kunnen gered worden van door “N-methyl-N'-nitro-N-nitrosoguanidine (MNNG) geïnduceerde parthanatos. Deze klasse van allosterische remmers zijn mogelijke targets voor geneesmiddelen bij behandeling van parthanatos gerelateerde ziekten.

In **Hoofdstuk 7** onderzoeken we de link tussen MIF en een andere vorm van gereguleerde celdood, ferroptose⁹. Ferroptose heeft een duidelijk gereguleerd mechanisme, welke mogelijk kan worden benut om therapie resistente kankers te behandelen¹⁰. Ferroptose wordt voornamelijk aangedreven door de ijzer-gemedieerde Fenton reactie en lipide peroxidatie, welke wordt tegengegaan door cytosolische oxidoreductases. Hoewel overmatige lipide peroxidatie een belangrijk kenmerk is van

ferroptose is de verwachting dat de door ijzer-gemedieerde Fenton reactie ook DNA schade kan induceren. Hierdoor hebben we de hypothese dat naast cytosolische oxidoreductases DNA reparatie mechanismen ook een rol spelen bij de bescherming tegen ferroptose. In **Hoofdstuk 7** laten we zien dat de inhibitie van homologe recombinatie (HR) e door middel van genetische depletie van HR eiwitten (zoals breast cancer type 1 susceptibility protein (BRCA1) en DNA repair protein RAD51 homolog 1 (RAD51)) verschillende kanker cellijnen een factor 10-100 gevoeliger maakt voor ferroptose. Ondertussen verhoogt chemische of genetische downregulatie van de cellulaire niveaus van het cytokine MIF de gevoeligheid voor ferroptose ook met factor 10-100. We konden aantonen dat MIF zich in dezelfde pathway bevindt als BRCA1 en RAD51 in HR. Ze interfereren met HR en induceren de translocatie van P53 naar de mitochondriën, met daaropvolgende stimulatie van de productie van radical oxygen species (ROS). Onze resultaten laten zien dat de aanwezigheid van een MIF-BRCA1-RAD51 as betrokken is bij HR, welke ferroptose tegen gaat. Dit geeft ons een significant inzicht in het gebruik hiervan bij de diagnostisering en behandeling van kanker.

Concluderend hebben we verschillende moleculaire mechanismen ontdekt die DNA transcriptie en DNA schade reparatie moduleren die ten grondslag liggen aan regulerende celdood. Ook ontwikkelden we nieuwe target compounds om celdood te moduleren in ziekte modellen.

